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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that the rationality of the logic of good reasons is constituted in its use. To support this claim, the paper presents an analysis of the relationship between being reasonable and being rational. It then considers how following the logic of good reasons leads to rationality in the behavior of individuals and groups; the latter consideration is offered in support of H. W. Johnstone's statement that each philosophical position has its own style. Finally, the paper discusses how differences in style result from differences in rules of rational interaction and the warrants that are allowable in different fields of inquiry and action. (FI)

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Rationality and the Logic of Good Reasons

Walter R. Fisher

At a critical point in his essay on "Rationality and Rhetoric in Philosophy," Professor Johnstone wrote: "No attribution seems more in need of rational discussion and defense than the attribution to any activity of the very property of rationality. So it is incumbent upon me to say in what way the very process through which philosophical arguments are demolished establishes the rationality of the philosophical enterprise."[1] The very process by which philosophy becomes rational, Professor Johnstone went on to argue, is rhetorical; it involves "a self-perpetuating rhetoric."[2] In a more recent work, "From Philosophy to Rhetoric and Back," he extends this argument. The features of the type of rhetoric he seeks become clearer. It is non-manipulative, bilateral, deliberative, reflexive, and attentive to data.[3] He goes on to contend that "each major philosophical position has its own style of rhetoric, and the style is integral to the position."[4]

I have reviewed Professor Johnstone's argument for several reasons. First, I find myself at a similar critical point to the one he faced in his first essay. Having attributed rationality to the logic of good reasons, which I delineated in an essay published in The Quarterly Journal of Speech (December, 1978), It is incumbent upon me to say in what way

this is so.[5] Second, I concur in Professor Johnstone's view that the rationality of philosophy must be grounded in rhetoric. Indeed, I would hold that the rationality of any verbal communicative interaction is grounded in rhetoric. Third, I think the structure of this rhetoric can be described by the logic of good reasons, and this structure conforms to the requirements of the rhetoric Professor Johnstone envisions. The logic of good reasons entails a concept that is self-perpetuating, nonmanipulative, bilateral, deliberative, reflexive, and attentive to data.

To make this assertion is, of course, to attribute rationality to the logic of good reasons again, without explanation. So the question remains: how is this so? My answer to this question is the subject of this paper. Specifically, I shall contend that the rationality of the logic of good reasons is constituted in its use. To support this claim, I shall first analyze the relationship between being reasonable and being rational. My aim in this analysis is to circumscribe the concept of rationality. I shall move second to a consideration of how following the logic of good reasons leads to rationality in the behavior of individuals and groups. In the latter consideration, I shall reinforce what Professor Johnstone has said about each philosophical position having its own style and

indicate how differences in style result from differences in rules of rational interaction and the warrants that are allowable in different fields of inquiry and action.

1.

The keynote of the position I shall propose is a statement by W. B. Gallie. He recommends "that we regard a person as rational in respect to moral issues when he is prepared to discuss, or has the habit and equipment for discussing, the morally relevant pros and cons of any proposed action. In morals, as much as in religion and politics, the notion of discussion is of far greater importance for the definition of rationality and rational will, then is the notion of demonstrative proof."[6] In line with this view and the idea that rationality is demonstrated in the use of the logic of good reasons, I shall maintain that rationality is an essential property of rhetorical competence. Put another way: mastery of the logic of good reasons insures that one has the minimal, perhaps the optimal, kind of knowledge that must inform the invention, composition, presentation, and criticism of rhetorical messages and interactions, if these arts are to be manifested rationally. If I had to define rhetorical competence more precisely, I would say that it is a term that not only

encompasses knowledge and ability in the rational arts--the logic of good reasons--, it would also refer to proficiency in the arts of invention, composition, presentation, and audience analysis.

Being reasonable, like being rational, is an essential ingredient of rhetorical competence. Being reasonable, however, is more indicative of an attitude than an ability to participate effectively in communicative interactions. By characterizing being reasonable as an attitude, I do not mean to suggest that it is not a vital component of rhetorical transactions. On the contrary, as I have already maintained, being reasonable is an essential ingredient of rhetorical competence. And I agree with Perelman's stand that reasonableness is prerequisite to a pluralistic view of the world, that it is the force that transforms rationality into a humane exercise of the mind. The idea of a democratic person, which is a presumption of non-monolithic societies, is constituted by the concepts of reasonableness and rationality. Rationality is viewed here in terms of informal logic, of practical reasoning. As Perelman notes, insofar as rationality is conceived as adherence to formal logic, where major premises are mandated by fixed conceptions of government, the result is a monistic system--a closed society. In this way, rationality becomes the handmaiden of conservatism.

The concept of rationality in this paper makes it an instrument for reasoned change.[7]

Being reasonable, in other words, is an aspect of rationality, not its substance. To say that someone is reasonable is to say that that person uses reasons and is appreciative of and tolerant toward others who use reasons to justify their views. Being rational, on the other hand, implies that one not only respects reasoning, it also involves the requirements that one know the nature of argumentative issues, the forms of argument and their tests, and the rules that govern the particular kind of argumentative interaction that one may be an actor in, whether scientific, political, legal, ethical, or whatever. One may be reasonable but not competent; one cannot be rational and incompetent.

To clarify this distinction further, I would like to consider a series of three argumentative interactions. First, an instance in which A asserts: "Capital punishment is murder, clear and simple." B responds: "It's no such thing! Capital punishment is just retribution. Be reasonable." A reacts by declaring: "What do you mean, be reasonable? You're the one who is unreasonable." Here we can see a popular conception of argument at work--a verbal and emotional disagreement. There

are no statements made to justify claims and the issue between the disputants becomes personal rather than substantive. Indeed, the implicit message of a demand that one be reasonable is that the person proposing an argument either (a) is ignorant, he or she does not know the facts in the case; (b) is stupid, he or she has the facts but does not draw proper inferences from them; or (c) the person has the facts, reasons from them well but does not begin with the same assumptions or premises as the challenger. The situation I have described is clearly an unreasonable one. It is not self-perpetuating, it is manipulative, it is not bilateral in any meaningful way, and it is not deliberative, reflexive, or attentive to data.

Second, an interaction in which A says: "Capital punishment is immoral; it denies the injunction that thou shalt not commit murder." B replies: "That's a reasonable position, but I disagree. I think capital punishment is a civil act, not the action of an individual rejecting the laws of the state, and is justified morally by the precept of an 'eye for an eye.'" A responds: I see what you are saying but I don't agree that there is a difference between the actions of a state and an individual when it comes to putting a person to death." B counters: "Well, I guess we'll just have to agree to disagree. I see no way to resolve our differences." This en-

counter exhibits reasonableness; that is, the disputants offer justifications of their claims, they respect each other's arguents, and they do not personalize the conflict. They part company on the nature of capital punishment but do it amicably, suggesting that they can continue their relationship and argue about other matters. The interaction displays two important elements of rationality--the ability and willingness to support one's claims with evidence and regard for the other. It does not, however, reveal other significant components of rationality.

Modified by indications of special knowledge in rhetorical argument, the second interaction can be transformed into an adequate illustration of rationality. The necessary features would include evidence that the arguers were aware of the historical positions taken on the use of the Biblical warrants of not killing and just retribution; recognition of the other issues and arguments besides morality in the dispute over capital punishment (such as the justice and equity of the law); demonstration by the actors that they know and can apply the appropriate tests for each of the arguments they and their opponents put forth; and, a showing that the disputants are conscious of the fact that the argument is on-going, that it will continue, and whatever they decide, the argument will need to be re-argued.

I have not mentioned here one further feature of rationality--the adherence to the rules of reasoning in a particular field. I shall have more to say of this feature later in the essay. Rationality would be evident in this revised case by virtue not only of reasons and reasonableness, but also by a rhetoric that is self-perpetuating, nonmanipulative, bilateral, deliberative, reflexive, and attentive to data. Such a rhetoric would reveal the logic of good reasons as it should be utilized.

II.

By way of transition to my second major concern--how employing the logic of good reasons leads to rationality in the behavior of individuals and groups,--I would like to consider an inevitable question in this exploration. The question is this: can a person be rational without being reasonable? My answer is no, insofar as one is arguing with another; it is yes, insofar as one is arguing, that is, reasoning, within her or himself. One cannot be rational and unreasonable in an interaction with an other, as I have already implied, because being reasonable is an aspect of rationality, the social aspect. Being reasonable requires the presence of an other. One offers reasons to persuade others and one can only be tolerant of an other. Tolerance is a quality of interpersonal,

not intrapersonal communication. One should not be considered fully rational in interpersonal interactions unless one is also reasonable.

If one accepts the view that being reasonable is a necessary constitutent of rationality, as the term is applied to persons arguing, one can develop a useful conception of manipulative rhetoric. All rhetorical interaction is manipulative in that communicators intend messages and are strategic in their choice of causes, selection of materials, design of compositions, and style of presentation. Every communicator, in other words, seeks to make the best possible case for his or her position. The object of manipulation is the subject matter of the communication. Manipulative rhetoric is a term that should be applied to those symbolic interactions in which the object of manipulation is the audience. Evidence of such manipulation exists when a communicator exhibits one or more of the following traits: (1) the use of technical knowledge of rhetorical strategies and tactics, of issues, argumentative forms, tests of arguments, and so on in an intolerant, self-serving way; (2) the discourse reveals that the aim is not to perpetuate dialogue, to encourage an authentic bilateral exchange, to further deliberation, to invite true criticism, or to advance the truth of the matter; (3) the function of the communication is to

serve personal ambition rather than self-discovery or social knowledge or public action.

I do not mean to imply that these traits are always easy to identify, that one can quickly or surely claim that any given communicator at any given time is clearly manipulating subject matter or audience. As a matter of fact, one sort of manipulation trades on the other, but there is, I am arguing, a difference between adjusting ideas to audiences and audiences to ideas, and deceptively designing discourse to deceive people. It is a matter of fact that we do say that some communicators are manipulative based on observing them over a period of time. My point is that when we make such a claim, we should do so by virtue of the communicator's treatment of the audience as a means to his or her own selfish ends, and the term manipulative rhetoric should be reserved to designate such cases. Viewed from this perspective, manipulative rhetoric is irrational; it lacks the basic ingredient of reasonableness.

In maintaining that one can be rational by oneself, I take exception to the stand of Professor Hardwig that rationality can only be demonstrated by persons interacting in a dialogue. He insists that only in such encounters can one achieve the objectivity that rationality requires.[8] My response to this position is twofold: First, it assumes that

inner dialogue does not involve others. Second, it ignores the fact that inner dialogue and outer dialogue rely on the same body of knowledge when they are rational--the criterial considerations of the logic of good reasons. These are "objective" matters in that they are constituted and utilized intersubjectively; they are consistent and relevant elements whenever rhetorical decision is at hand; they provide a methodical way to identify issues, relevant data, and sound reasoning. As Perelman points out, the individual person can be considered a kind of particular audience, one that has the capacity to incarnate the "universal audience," and when this happens, the person "can enjoy the philosophic privilege conferred to reason...."[9]

Professor Hardwig confuses, in my judgement, rationalization and rationality. It is certainly the case that all individuals rationalize from time to time, alone and in the presence of others, but it is also true that some, if not all, individuals reason in such a way that their decisionmaking can be called rational. To put the point concretely: Professor Hardwig's essay, which is an example of monologic communication, exhibits rationality, and our exchange, which represents dialogic communication, also reflects rationality.

My argument throughout this paper has been that when in-

dividuals, by themselves or in the presence of others, reason in such a way that their decisionmaking can be called rational, it can be shown that they will have utilized the elements of the logic of good reasons. By this I explicitly mean that they will have employed special knowledge of the issues, both procedural and evaluative, in the given case, they will have informed themselves of relevant data, assessed the arguments that can be made for and against the decision, weighed the values that impinge on the matter, and decided the most reasonable position to uphold. In advocating their position, they will exhibit reasonableness in monologic and dialogic interactions. Reasoning that can be characterized in this way is rational and constitutes a significant degree of rhetorical competence regardless of the field of knowledge and/or action.

One establishes one's rationality in special fields ~~of~~ by knowing and using the warrants indigenous to that field and adhering to the particular rules of advocacy followed in it. Thus, as Professor Johnstone suggests, one may be considered competent in a school of philosophical thought if that person exhibits its style, its style being fashioned by appropriate grounding of arguments on approved warrants and in respect to the accepted norms of argumentative interaction. In their recent book, An Introduction to Reasoning, Toulmin, Rieke,

and Janik demonstrate convincingly that the same principle holds in regard to reasoning in such fields as law, science, art, ethics, and business management. They also point out that the variables of warrant and procedure will vary over time. They wrote:

> Indeed what makes it possible to speak of such enterprises as science and law and management as 'rational' enterprises at all has as much to do with the ways in which they transform themselves in the course of their history as it does with the particular 'rational standard' employed within them at any one time. It is not the truth or solidity of the positions adopted by scientists at any particular moment that makes the natural sciences 'rational.' It is, rather, the 'adaptability' of scientific procedures and principles in the face of new experience and new conceptions. ... It is the openness of scientists to argument--their readiness if need be, to revise even their most fundamental procedures of argument--that marks their activity off as an enterprise with some genuine claim to rationality.[10]

And the same may be said, I think, of any other field of en-

deavor that lives by reasoning.

In conclusion, knowledge of, ability in, willingness to employ the logic of good reasons guarantee rationality in rhetorical interaction, which is, in my judgment, the most important component in rhetorical competence. Rationality in specialized fields requires an adherence to its rhetorical presuppositions, procedures, and practices. Being reasonable and being rational are not only essential constituents of rhetorical competence, they are also necessary conditions of democratic communities and nations.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "Rationality and Rhetoric in Philosophy," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 59 (December 1973), 385-86.

[2] Ibid., p. 388.

[3] Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., "From Philosophy to Rhetoric and Back," in Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature, ed., Don M. Burks (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1978), pp. 49-66.

[4] Ibid., p. 63.

[5] Walter R. Fisher, "Toward a Logic of Good Reasons," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 64 (December 1978), 376-384.

[6] W(alter). B(ryce). Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), pp. 206-07.

[7] Chaim Perelman, "The Rational and the Reasonable," a lecture presented at the University of Southern California, December 1978. See also: Mieczyslaw Maneli,"The New Theory of Argumentation and American Jurisprudence," Logique Et Analyse, 81 (Mars 1978), 30-37.

[8] John Hardwig, "The Achievement of Moral Rationality," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 6 (Summer 1973), 171-185.

[9] Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, Trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), pp. 32-33. See also: Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, trans. Clarence Smith Howe (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 113-114.

[10] Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke, and Allan Janik, An Introduction to Reasoning (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., and London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1979), p. 134.